

## CHAPTER - VII

### THE GURDWARA REFORM MOVEMENT AND THE *UDĀSĪ MAHANTS*

*The Gurudwaras*<sup>1</sup> and *Dharamsalas* have played a vital role in shaping the history of the Sikhs and the development of the Sikh religious tradition. The *Guru*, the *Granth* and the *Gurdwara*, these religious structures have traditionally been the centres of the religious, social, cultural and political life of the Sikhs.<sup>2</sup> Guru Nanak established the institution of the *Sangat* and the *Pangat*. Wherever he went, he left behind a *Sangat* with an injunction to build *Dharamsala*<sup>3</sup> with the purpose of meeting in a common forum.<sup>4</sup> The institution of the *Sangat*<sup>5</sup> and the *Pangat* continued under the successors of Guru Nanak. The *Masands* and the *Sangats* became the central organisation of the Sikhs for the propagation work and collection of funds. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh's period the *Masands* developed into disruptive force and hence he abolished the institution of the *Masands*.

After the execution of Banda Bahadur in 1716, till the rise of the *Misaldars*, a period of terror and persecution followed by the orders of Emperor Bahadur Shah and Farrukhsiar, and their Punjab Governors Abdus Samad Khan, Zakariya Khan and Mir Mannu. The Sikhs also suffered during the Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions from 1748 to 1767. The result was that when a large number of Sikhs, along with their Sikh preachers were forced into exile, the Sikh shrines passed into the control of the *Udāsī Mahants*.

Even after the Mughal rule, these shrines continued to be looked after by the *Udāsīs*, and the post of *Granthi*-cum-manager passed from father to son. The less important *Gurdwaras* were looked after by the men who wished to dedicate their life to the prayer and the service of the community. With the establishment of the British

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<sup>1</sup> Gurdwara, A Sikh Temple. Generally, The Place of Worship of the Sikhs.

<sup>2</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi 1988, p. 1; Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, Sikh Itihas Research Board, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, 1965, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> The first Sikh Temple was probably established by Nanak at Kartarpur after his return from his travels. It was then a simple *Dharmasala* (a place of worship), where his disciples gathered to listen to his discourses and to sing hymns. Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-2004, Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2007, New Delhi, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 9: throughout the British times the *Sangats* (congregation) were supposed to be the in-charge of the Gurdwaras.

rule new settlement records had to be made. In many of these, the lands and the properties attached to the *Gurdwaras* were entered against the names of the *Mahants*.<sup>6</sup>

## I

The *Udāsīs* in charge of the various *Gurdwaras* rendered important service to the Sikh religion by keeping the *Gurdwaras* going and were highly respected as men of high moral character and integrity. They were well versed in the Sikh scriptures and devoted themselves chiefly to reciting and expounding the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. In the earlier stages these *Mahants* enjoyed the confidence and reverence of *Sangats* of their areas. They also warned their *chelas* at the time of admission into their Order to avoid two deadly temptations gold and the women. These *Mahants* also nominated their successors to the *gaddis*. Their nominees were accepted by the *Sangats*. Both *Mahants* and their *chelas* enjoyed popular esteem and confidence. But this tradition of purity and austerity seems to have deteriorated as the result of the increase in their income derived from revenue free *jagirs* bestowed on most of the historic shrines by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and other Sikh *Misaldars*.<sup>7</sup> The *Mahants* became inherited masters of the sacred shrines, gave up all symptoms of Sikhism excepting the beard and the turban. Though the *Mahants* were known to be the managers and custodians, and not the owners of the *Gurdwaras*, the concerned officials tacitly encouraged them to seek the protection of the law which regarded them as owners. They adopted all sorts of corruption and vices. Idols were placed in various *Gurdwaras* and their worship was becoming common contrary to the principles of the Sikh gospel.<sup>8</sup>

The misappropriation of the religious funds and change in the life style of the custodian *Mahants* was being looked down upon by the Sikhs but lack of any social organisation prevented any move to turn them out. Early twentieth century saw the rise of provincial movements such as the *Nirankaris*, the *Namdharis*, and the Singh Sabha in conjunction with all India movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Dev Samaj and the Arya Samaj. Moreover, the increasing political consciousness and response to Nationalist upsurge through out the country also played a large part. It was the cumulative effect of these internal and external forces which created an

<sup>6</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, 1839-1988, pp. 194-95.

<sup>7</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, pp. 3-4.; also see, Mohinder Singh, "British Policy towards the Akali Movement", *Punjab Past and Present*, 1976, pp. 176-190.

<sup>8</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, Sikh Itihas Research Board, SGPC Amritsar, 1965, p. 6; Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, pp. 18-19.

awakening among the people in the Punjab and also the desire among the Sikhs to reform the shrines.<sup>9</sup>

The persecution of the Kukas and the suppression of their movement saw the birth of the Singh Sabha. The Singh Sabha Amritsar was formed, in 1873 to check the Hindu propagation against the Sikh Gurus.<sup>10</sup> At Lahore, another Singh Sabha was formed in 1879. The main task of the Sabha was to spread literacy, education and religious awareness among the Sikhs.<sup>11</sup> In 1883, the Lahore and Amritsar Singh Sabhas were merged.<sup>12</sup> Both Singh Sabha and the Chief Khalsa Diwan promoted a modern sense of self consciousness and identity among the Sikhs. The Chief Khalsa Dewan founded in 1902 acted as coordinating body for the Singh Sabha Movement.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary the Chief Khalsa Dewan helped the British authorities.<sup>14</sup>

The Sikh masses looked forward to the Singh Sabha for the eradication of evils which had entered the historical Sikh Shrines under the control of *Pujaris* and *Sadhus*.<sup>15</sup> Singh Sabha passed many resolutions and made representations to the Government for the purification of the Sikh shrines but they did not succeed in their mission.<sup>16</sup>

The agrarian unrest of 1907 exploded the myth of the loyalty of the Punjabis and marked the beginning of mass political awakening in the province.<sup>17</sup> The revolutionary Ghadr propaganda made major headway in the Punjab during the First World War. Though the movement failed but it was able to make a major contribution towards the articulation of discontentment against the British rule by inspiring many people by their patriotic and revolutionary propaganda.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-2004, Oxford University Press, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), 2007, New Delhi, p.141 Also see Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 7.; for details about the Kuka Movement see.; <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Namdhari>

<sup>11</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion, Politics in North India*, Vikas Publishing House Delhi, 1975, p. 309.

<sup>12</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-2004, Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2007, New Delhi, p.143, But the association had proved a failure.

<sup>13</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion, Politics in North India*, p. 309. Also see; [http:// en.Wikipedia .org/wiki/Singh\\_Sabha\\_Movement](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Singh_Sabha_Movement).

<sup>14</sup> SC Mittal, *Freedom Movement in Punjab (1905-29)*, Concept Publishing Company Delhi, 1977, p.139. for details see ; <http://www.chiefkhalasadiwan.com/history.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 9, 'the writer mentions the Mahants as *Pujaris* and *Sadhus* signifying their commonality to the Hindus rather than the Sikhs'.

<sup>16</sup> Davinder Singh, *Akali Politics in Punjab (1964-85)*, National Book Organisation, New Delhi, 1993, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> The agrarian unrest of 1907 was the first instance in the Punjab, in which the rural classes, especially the *jat* Sikh peasantry in the canal colonies, gave expression to their discontent against the policies of the British Government.

<sup>18</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-1988, p. 183.

Initiative for the reform was taken by the Sikh and the pro-Sikh news papers as early as 1905, when some of the news papers like the *Khalsa Advocate*, the *Khalsa Samachar*, the *Khalsa Sewak* and *The Punjab*, began complaining about the management of the Golden Temple, Amritsar and other important Sikh Shrines. These papers expressed grief and pain at the *Gurdwaras* and other trust holdings being converted into private properties of the *Mahants* and also other abuses prevailing in the system of management. *The Punjab* reminded the *Mahants* that 'The *Gurdwaras* belong to the Sikh community and not the priests, who are mere servants of the *Panth*'.<sup>19</sup>

In 1906, under pressure from the Singh Sabhas and the Sikh press, the Chief Khalsa Diwan passed a resolution asking the government that the rules governing the management of the Golden Temple be so changed as to allow the *Panth* the right to appoint its manager and other officials but it went without any success. After having failed at the resolutions and petitions, some Sikhs of advanced political opinions decided to boycott the temples, to exert greater public pressure on the *Mahants* and even litigations were tried to get the *Gurdwaras* vacated but to no success.<sup>20</sup>

The resentment of the Sikhs against the British attitude was growing but it could not be channelised. The opportunity came in January 14, 1914 when the British Indian Government demolished the wall of *Gurdwara Rakabganj* Delhi to the ground on the pretext of making the road run straight.<sup>21</sup> Singh Sabha launched protest to the Government. At that time the British Government had entered War and the Sikhs formed considerable proportion of the British Indian army. The Government could not afford to disregard the Sikh sentiments at that time as such the wall of the garden was restored but the *Gurdwara* wall remained in the same condition. The Singh Sabha leaders gave up the agitation due to their cooperation to the Government during the War. After the War was over, the matter of *Gurdwara Rakabganj* again got prominence. Sikhs who had helped wholeheartedly to the British Government in the War wanted the restoration of the *Gurdwara* wall. But British Government did not pay any respect to the sentiments of the Sikhs. The Singh Sabha leaders decided to

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<sup>19</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> The courts of law were slow in giving justice and *Akalis* were not ready to wait that long.

<sup>21</sup> Gaini Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar*, Singh Brothers, Mai Sewan, Amritsar, 1951, PP29-31; also see, Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 58; [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Gurdwara\\_Rakab\\_Ganj\\_Sahib](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Gurdwara_Rakab_Ganj_Sahib); <http://www.reading-gurdwara.org.uk/sikhism/historical.html>

send *Shahidi Jatha*<sup>22</sup> to Delhi to rebuild the demolished wall. Thus, realizing the seriousness of the situation the Government through Maharaja Ripu Daman of Nabha, arranged for the reconstruction of the wall.<sup>23</sup> This was a great success on the part of the Singh Sabha. The Singh Sabha realizing the importance of *Shahidi Jathas*, adopted same technique and method to further launch an agitation to free the *Gurdwaras* from the clutches of the corrupt *Mahants*.

The demolition of the wall of *Gurdwara Rakabganj*, Delhi, the tragedy of Budge-Budge, the demobilization of the Sikh soldiers after the War and the unsatisfactory treatment meted out to them during the War, further added to the discontent created by the Ghadrites propaganda. Several other factors contributed to the aggravation of political unrest like failure of summer monsoon, poor *rabi* harvest, the cost of living rose higher than ever before. Also there was imposition of special tax on urban population. Last of all came the influenza epidemic.<sup>24</sup>

On the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> November 1920, a mass meeting of Nationalist Sikhs was held where the committee of a 175 members was formed. Its main object was to manage, reform and control the Sikh shrines and *Gurdwaras*. It soon came to be known as Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.<sup>25</sup> The committee was given the task of the management of the *Gurdwaras* through its military wing i.e Shiromani Akali Dal and to launch militant agitation through its Akalis *Jathas* to free the *Gurdwaras* from the clutches of corrupt, and Hinduised *Mahants*.<sup>26</sup>

The reform of the *Gurdwaras* frequently meant removal of Hinduized priests and Hindu influences, including Hindu idols, from the precincts of Sikh shrines. Some Hindus in the Punjab naturally resented these aspects of the reform movement. Though outwardly the British Government adopted the neutral policy but actually encouraged the *Mahants* to adopt stiffer attitude towards the Akali reformers and

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<sup>22</sup> *Shahidi Jatha*- a group of Sikh martyrs.

<sup>23</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, Sikh Itihas Research Board, p. 58-59.

<sup>24</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p.12.

<sup>25</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, RC Publishers Delhi, 1977, p.46-47, Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-2004, Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2007, New Delhi, p. 198; Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Shiromani Akali Dal came into existence with four objectives; (1) to bring the Sikh religious places under Panthak control and management, (2) to do away with the permanent position of the *Mahants*, thus, ending their irresponsibility (3) to utilize the property and income of the *Gurdwaras* for the purpose of which they were founded (4) to practice the Sikh religion according to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus as preserved in the *Adi-Granth*.

<sup>26</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion, Politics in North India*, p. 283, 84, 311, 312. Also see ; Vinod Kumar, *Akali Politics in the Punjab* p. 31 ;[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Shiromani\\_Gurdwara\\_Prabandhak\\_Committee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiromani_Gurdwara_Prabandhak_Committee).

supported them by declaring “any person who attempts to forcibly oust any *Mahant* ... is liable to punishment under the law”.<sup>27</sup>

The Gurdwara Reform Movement is significant in three respects (1) it created a sense of confidence among the Indians that the British could be forced to meet their genuine demands through non-violent mass movement; (2) it brought the Akali Dal and the Congress leadership very close to each other, giving a great impetus to the freedom movement in Punjab; (3) the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Akali Dal provided the institutional and organizational structure to respond to the aspirations of the newly mobilized Sikh masses, and in the process it acted as the training ground for the emerging Sikh leadership.<sup>28</sup>

In the course of their five year (1920-25) struggle the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Akali Dal were not only able to oust the *Mahants* rather obtained the control over all the important Sikh shrines through peaceful agitation and passive sufferings, but also to strengthen the forces of nationalism in the Punjab by ejecting the *Mahants*, the government appointed managers and other vested interests in the Sikh communities. Once the important Sikh shrines came under the Akali control, the *Mahants* in charge of the smaller *Gurdwaras* either voluntarily submitted to the authority of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee or were made to surrender their shrines and the *jagirs* attached to them under the provisions of the Sikh *Gurdwaras* and Shrines Bill passed in July 1925.<sup>29</sup>

## II

In the Charitable and Religious Endowment Act (Act XIV of 1920)<sup>30</sup> some rights were given to the beneficiaries in the control and management of temples. Therefore the Sikh reformers, in the beginning, went to the courts of law in the hope to obtain

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<sup>27</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion, Politics in North India*, p. 283, 84, 311, 312, A letter in file no. 179-II/1922.

<sup>28</sup> Davinder Singh, *Akali Politics in Punjab (1964-85)*, p. 30; [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Gurdwara\\_Reform\\_Movement](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Gurdwara_Reform_Movement).

<sup>29</sup> Mohinder Singh Opines that over three hundred large and small *Gurdwaras* were liberated by the Akalis: Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 19, 20. Also see, Wali Ullah Khan, , *Sikh Shrines in west Pakistan*, Govt. of Pakistan, Lahore, 1962; Gurmukh Singh, (Major), *Historical Sikh Shrines*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1995; S.S. Johar, *The Sikh Gurus and their Shrines*, Delhi, 1976; Mehar Singh, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Govt. Of India, New Delhi, 1975; Iqbal Qaisar, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, Punjabi History Board, Lahore, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> The Charitable and Religious Trusts Act (Act XIV of 1920) quoted in Mukherjee's Hindu Law of Religious and Charitable Trusts, see Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 18.

popular control of their sacred places. Here too disappointment was in store for them. The courts could not help the reformers because of the law, as it stood then, made it obligatory on the part of two or more beneficiaries of a temple to join hands to go to the Deputy Commissioner for permission to sue the *Mahants* guilty of misappropriation of funds. The Deputy Commissioner, being a support or of the vested interests, used his discretion to deny the necessary permission in most of the cases. In other cases where the reformers succeeded in obtaining the required permission, the cases could not be followed up for want of exorbitant court fees prescribed by the judicial machinery.<sup>31</sup>

Being convinced of the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the legal remedies for reforms, the reformers now organised themselves in the form of local Akali *Jathas*. The decisive period in the growth of a modern, militant Sikh identity and the institutionalization of Sikh consciousness came during the Gurdwara Reform Movement. The Sikhs launched agitations at the sights of important Sikh shrines in order to free them from the control of allegedly corrupt and Hinduised *Mahants*.

*Mahant* Harnam Singh of *Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber*, Sialkot<sup>32</sup> died and his minor son *Mahant* Gurcharan Singh was appointed successor under guardianship of a non-Sikh named Ganda Singh, an honorary Magistrate<sup>33</sup>. It led to resentment among the Singh Sabha and the Sikhs throughout the Punjab. The reformers reacted by filing a civil suit but were ordered by the district judge to pay court fee of rupee 50,000. The reformers failed to pay 50,000 as court fee to file civil suit, thus, resorted to agitation. Ganda Singh placed many hurdles but reformers got control of the shrine by the end of September-October 1920<sup>34</sup>. On October 5, 1920 the Sikhs had a big *Dewan* and elected permanent Committee of 13 members for the control of *Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber* Sahib.<sup>35</sup>

The corrupt and non-Sikh practices in the precincts of the Golden Temple and the *Akal Takht* at Amritsar and official control over its management had been a source of great discontentment among the Sikhs long before the beginning of the movement

<sup>31</sup> The cases of Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber, Sialkot and Panja Sahib could not be perused for want of court fees of Rs. 50,000 in the case of former and Rs. 5,000 in the case of the latter. Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Lehar*, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> The Gurdwara, was built in the memory of *Guru Nanak's* visit to that place, came to be popularly known as Bae-di-ber because the *Guru* sat under a *Ber* tree there.

<sup>33</sup> Gaini Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar*, pp. 83-87; Sohan Singh Josh, *Alkali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 29-39.

<sup>34</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 20.

for reform. The *Mahants* of the Golden temple and the British Deputy Commissioner were hand in glove and were ignoring the sentiments and opinion of the Sikh masses. 'The government *Sarbrah* having kept the appointing authority appeased, spent his time in appropriating the huge wealth of the shrine, and consequently, neglected his daily religious duties. Costly gifts to the temple slowly found their way to the homes of the *Sarbrah* and other priests.<sup>36</sup>

The precincts were used by *Pandits* and Astrologers. The idols were openly worshipped in the *Gurudwara*. According to contemporary accounts, on *Basant* and *Holi* festivals, the whole place degenerated into a rendezvous for the local rogues, thieves and other bad characters. Pornographic literature was freely sold, and brothels were opened in the neighbouring houses.<sup>37</sup>

The agitation against the Golden Temple affair had started way back in 1906 when a meeting of the Sikh Youth on 22 December 1906 passed a resolution asking the Government to hand over the control of Darbar Sahib to the Chief Khalsa Dewan. Similar resolutions were passed in the other parts of the Punjab also.<sup>38</sup> The Central Sikh League in a meeting held at Amritsar in 1920 again referred to the long standing grievances of the Sikhs connected with the Golden Temple. The demand for the control and management of the Sikh holy shrine Golden Temple was made in the Punjab Legislative Council and Government was requested to make the accounts public. But the movement could not make any headway. It got impetus after the formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee in 1920.<sup>39</sup> Sardar Arur Singh *Sarbrah* of Golden Temple appeared before the Diwan, begged for forgiveness and announced his resignation.

The Golden Temple and the adjoining *Gurdwaras* had passed into the control of the Akalis in October 1920. Though Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee and the Committee appointed by it, controlled the affairs of the Golden Temple but the fact that the keys of *Tosha Khana* were in the hands of Sunder Singh Ramgarhia gave feeling of Government control over the *Gurdwaras*. Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, being suspicious of bonfides of Baba Kharak Singh, the President of the

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<sup>36</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Gaini Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar*, pp.73-77,130-151; Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 36, 40,41.

<sup>38</sup> *Khalsa Advocate*, May-June 1906; *The Punjab*, May 1906 cited in Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Punjab Legislative Council Proceedings, March 13, 1920, cited in Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 22.



Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee, took keys of the Tosha (treasury) Khana and gave it to his nominee or *Sarbrah*.<sup>40</sup> Akalis demanded the keys<sup>41</sup> to be returned to Kharak Singh, the president of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee. In a meeting held on October 29, 1921, the executive Committee of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee had asked Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, the Government appointed manager, to hand over the keys to Kharak Singh. The Akalis were disturbed when they discovered that Deputy Commissioner Amritsar had sent Lala Amarnath an extra Assistant Commissioner with a Police party to Ramgarhia's house to collect the keys of *Toshakhana*. Protests were carried out by Akalis which resulted in arrest of 193 leading Akalis.<sup>42</sup> Government finally had to give into the Akalis and all arrested were released unconditionally. The Akalis got total control over *Gurdwara*. Mahatma Gandhi sent a telegram to the new President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee, 'First Battle for India's Freedom Won. Congratulations.'<sup>43</sup> The British Officer, a District Judge himself arrived at a *Dewan* held at Akal Takht and handed over the keys of *Tosha Khana* to Sardar Kharak Singh, President Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee in October 1921.<sup>44</sup>

The Akali victory at Amritsar with the formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee and the Shiromani Akali Dal encouraged the local *Jathas* of the reformers. A *Jatha* of 25 Akalis was dispatched from Amritsar under the leadership of Bhai Kartar Singh *Jhabbar*. It reached *Panja Sahib* on November 18, 1920. The next day the supporters of *Mahants* had clashed with Akalis. Jathedar Kartar Singh *Jhabbar* took possession of the cash box containing the daily offerings and declared the *Mahant* a *tankhahia*, who was not to be allowed to enter the shrine till he went to the Akal Takht to beg pardon for his acts. Thus Panja Sahib *Gurdwara* passed into the control of the reformers and a representative management committee was soon formed to look after it.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-1988, p.201.

<sup>41</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 112-115.; Ganda Singh (ed.), *Some Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, 1965, 179.

<sup>42</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 69 & 220 'gives the number of the arrested leaders to be 198 while Khushwant Singh mentions 193 in , *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-1988, p. 202. Also see, Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-1988, p. 202; Also see, Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 48-50.

<sup>44</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 132-33.

<sup>45</sup> Gaini Partap Singh, Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar, PP.104-105; Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 24-25. Also see.; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurdwara\\_Panja\\_Sahib](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurdwara_Panja_Sahib)

The *Akali* occupation of other *Gurdwaras* of lesser historical significance including Chomala Sahib Lahore, Tham Sahib in village Jhambr Kalan of Lahore district, Khara Sauda and Kar Sahib<sup>46</sup> at Nankana, Chola Sahib at Ludhiana District, *Gurdwara* at Shekhupur and Khadur Sahib in Amritsar and Anandpur Sahib<sup>47</sup> soon followed. *Mahants* of most of these shrines on their own swore allegiance to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee and agreed to serve under it. Others were compelled to do so when the cases pending in the courts had been decided in the favour of the Akalis.<sup>48</sup>

The Darbar Sahib and Akal Takht had come under the control of the Sikhs without bloodshed, but at Tarn Taran, and fort-night later, at Nankana Sahib, the birth place of *Guru* Nanak Dev, the *Mahants* supported by the British authorities unleashed a violent attack upon hundreds of non-violent Akalai volunteers. Later the events at *Guru ka Bagh* and *Jaito* were even more tragic. The courage and the perseverance of the *Akali* volunteers forced the Government to pass the *Gurdwara* Act in 1925 and to release all *Akali* prisoners. The Sikhs in-spite of provocations remained peaceful. The principle of non-violent Satyagrah was put to test on a mass scale with great success and this had a significant bearing on subsequent developments in Sikh politic in particular, and in the National Movement in general. Mahatma Gandhi congratulated the Sikh masses and their leaders for achieving success through non-violence.<sup>49</sup>

The Darbar Sahib Tarntaran was founded by *Guru* Arjun Dev in 1500 AD and was famous for leper curing. It is situated within 15 kms of the city of Amritsar and had been under the same management as that of the Golden Temple and Akal Takht. During the days of Arur Singh, *Mahants* of TarnTaran became more or less independent and introduced many evil practices within the precincts of *Gurdwara*.<sup>50</sup> After the sanctity of *Gurdwara* at Amritsar had been restored those at TarnTaran naturally attracted the attention of the *Akali* reformers. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid,<sup>51</sup> a local leader of the reform movement is said to have invited the attention of the *Mahants* to the evils prevalent in the system of management and respectfully asked

<sup>46</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 219-21.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 228-29.

<sup>48</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 24-25.

<sup>49</sup> Davinder Singh, *Akali Politics in Punjab (1964-85)*, National Book Organisation, New Delhi, 1993, p.31.

<sup>50</sup> Gaini Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar*, pp. 106-111; Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 36, 54, 55.; for details of the Gurudwara see.; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarn\\_Taran\\_Sahib](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarn_Taran_Sahib).

<sup>51</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 55.

them to improve their ways. Sardar Lachhman Singh is also said to have made a similar plea. Sardar Lachhman Singh and the girls of his school were not allowed to enter the *Gurdwara* to recite *shabads* at *Gurdwara*.

When a local *Jatha* advised the *Mahants* to arrange for the recitation of *Asa di war* January 11, 1921, the *Mahants* are said to have beaten up the members of the *Jatha* with *lathis*.<sup>52</sup> In general meeting at Akal Takht<sup>53</sup> on January 24, 1921, the Akalis decided to march towards the Tarntaran to purify the place. On January 26, 1921 about 40 Akalis under the leadership of Teja Singh Bhhuchar reached there. The priest whose number is estimated to be 70, tried to provoke the Akalis but the clash was avoided a compromise was reached. The priest agreed to the formation of a joint committee to settle the dispute, which was a trick to prepare for an attack. At the same night the drunken priest around 9 pm attacked the peaceful and unsuspecting Akalis. Some members of the *Jatha* who were inside the *Gurdwara* were seriously wounded. The priests used *lathis* and daggers and brick-bats. The holy place was soon smeared with blood of the wounded *Akali* volunteers. Bhai Hazara Singh and Hukum Singh succumbed to their injuries. On receiving this news the district Magistrate, and the Superintendent of Police and other officials rushed to the place to meet the leaders of both the parties. On finding that Akalis were not to be blamed they expressed their sympathies for them by an official order the priests were barred from entering the *Gurdwara* until the matter was decided by the Prabandhak Committee. The *Gurdwara* having thus come into the hands of the reformers, a provincial committee of management was formed, pending the appointment of a regular committee by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee.<sup>54</sup> From TarnTaran a *Jatha* proceeded to Naurangabad and purified the shrine.<sup>55</sup>

Nankana<sup>56</sup>, the birth place of *Guru* Nanak was most richly endowed Sikh shrine. After the death of *Mahant* Sadhu Ram, Narain Das managed the *Janam*

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<sup>52</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 54-55, A lady 'In this meeting at Akal Takht had narrated the sorrow affair of the Tarn Taran Gurdwara where she along with her daughter had been molested. This hastened the decision of the assembly to take quick action against the *Pujaris* and *Mahants* of Tarntaran'.

<sup>54</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, , pp. 56-57.

<sup>55</sup> *Loc. Cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Apart from the Gurdwara of *Janam Asthan* where *Guru* Nanak was born, there are over half a dozen other shrines connected with different events connected with early life of the *Guru* like; *Bal Lila*, where *Guru* Nanak used to play during his childhood; *Kiara Sahib*, where the *Guru* made up the loss of a farmer whose field were spoilt by the *Guru's* buffalos; *Mal sahib*, where a snake is said to have spread its hood to protect the *Guru* from the sun; *Khara Sauda*, where *Guru* made a

*Asthan*. Narain Das lived in the *Gurdwara* with a mistress and was known to have invited prostitutes to dance in the sacred premises<sup>57</sup>. Though Sikhs wanted to eject him forcefully but the *Mahant* had the backing of local officials. Various Singh Sabhas had passed resolutions requesting the Government against the *Mahant*. The *Akali* reformers had made similar requests to *Mahant* Narain Das for reform. Narain Das on his own had sought Government assurance through Mr. CM King, the Commissioner of Lahore Division. A meeting of over 60 *Mahants* was held at Nankana Sahib and it was decided not to recognize the newly formed Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee. Rather a new Committee was formed with Narain Das as President and *Mahant* Basant Das as its Secretary. They also started Sant Sewak news paper from Lahore<sup>58</sup>. Fearing the fate of his *Gurdwara*, he made elaborate defense preparations, fortified *Nankana* and sought police protection along with his personal security guards. The act of *Mahant* was justified by the Mr. CM King, the Commissioner of Lahore Division.

On January 24, 1921 the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee decided to hold a Dewan at *Nankana* from March 4 to 6, 1921. *Mahant* Narain Das tried to placate the Akalis by showing his desire for a compromise.<sup>59</sup> He did not attend meeting at *Sachha Sauda*, Sultanpur called by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee.<sup>60</sup> Bhai Lachhman Singh left for *Nankana Sahib* February 19, 1921 and on February 20, 1921. Akalis led by Lachhman Singh Dharowalia<sup>61</sup> entered the *Gurdwara*. The gates of the shrines were closed and the *thugs* of Narain Das attacked the non-violent and bare handed *jatha* with swords and hatchets and fire arms. The dead and dying Akalis were dragged to a pile of logs which had been collected earlier

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good bargain by feasting the hungry Sadhus and *Patti Sahib* where the *Guru* wrote his first lesson on a wooden slate. Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, Fn -53, p. 28. Also see, Giani Gian Singh, *Gurdham Sangreh*, (Rare Book Section, No.929), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1919; Giani Thakur Singh, *Sri Gurdware Darshan*, (Rare Book Section, no. 1288), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1923; Pandit Tara Singh, *Sri Guru Tirath Sangrah*, Temple Press, Ambala, 1984; [http://www.sikhcybermuseum.org.uk/history/Nankana Massacre 1920.htm](http://www.sikhcybermuseum.org.uk/history/Nankana%20Massacre1920.htm).

<sup>57</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 58-59; Ganda Singh (ed.), *Some Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, p. 179. Also see, Ganda Singh (ed.), *Some Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, p. 179.

<sup>58</sup> Gaini Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar*, pp 112-129; Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 29-30.

<sup>59</sup> Actually he was gaining time to make further preparations as he wanted to teach SGPC a lesson to remember.

<sup>60</sup> *Akali* meeting to be held at *Sachha Sauda*, Sultanpur from February 7 to 9, 1921. and another meeting was to be held at Shekhupura February 15, 1921.

<sup>61</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 58-59.

and burnt. By the time the police and the locals came to the scene 130 men had been consumed by the flames<sup>62</sup>. *Gurdwara* was taken over by the army.<sup>63</sup> Jathedar Jhhabbar along with his 2200 Akali *Jatha* marched towards Nankana to take possession of *Gurdwara*. He was warned at Kharpwala through orders of Deputy Commissioner Lahore, Mr. Currie.<sup>64</sup> Ignoring the warning they reached *Janam Asthan* and took control of the *Gurdwara*.<sup>65</sup> Now Deputy Commissioner of Lahore consulted Commissioner of Lahore and handed over the keys to the representatives of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. After the arrest of Narain Das *Mahants* of more than half a dozen, other local *Gurdwaras*, felt utterly demoralized and surrendered their shrines to Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee.<sup>66</sup> In spite of a strong criticism of their action of the local officials and their responsibility for the tragedy, neither Viceroy of India nor any other member of Executive Council asked the Government of Punjab to take any action against the concerned officials. This shows that officials wanted the growing movement of Akalis to be crushed through *Mahants* and thus to save themselves from incurring the displeasure of the Sikh community.<sup>67</sup>

Guru ka Bagh, a small shrine 13 miles away from Amritsar had been erected to commemorate the visit of *Guru Arjun*. Adjacent to the shrine was a plot of land on which acacia (Kikar tree) trees were planted to provide firewood for *Guru ka langar*.<sup>68</sup> The *Udasi Mahant* Sunder Das<sup>69</sup> accepted baptism and submitted himself to the authority of an elected committee of management consisting of 11 members appointed by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee. Suddenly, in the first week of August 1921 he lodged a complaint that the Akalis were cutting timber from the *Gurdwara* land. Police arrested the Akalis and charged them with criminal trespass. Akalis held a meeting at *Guru ka Bagh* where police dispersed them and arrested leaders, including Mehtab Singh and Master Tara Singh.<sup>70</sup> The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee took the challenge and *Jathas* of 100 Akalis each were

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<sup>62</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-1988, p. 199.

<sup>63</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 78.

<sup>64</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74-75.

<sup>66</sup> Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p. 36.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41-42.

<sup>68</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 106.

<sup>69</sup> Gaini Partap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar* pp.156-164 ;Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 156-58; Also see, Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle, Retrospect*, p.52.

<sup>70</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p.157-58.

formed, which proceeded towards *Guru ka Bagh*. For 19 days the encounter between the police and passive resisters continued.<sup>71</sup> 5,605 Akalis had been arrested, and 936 were hospitalized. The Akalis took possession of *Guru ka Bagh* along with the disputed land. It was the second decisive battle won'.<sup>72</sup> With a sense of triumph Akalis arranged the cleansing of tank or *kar seva* of Golden Temple in summer of 1922. The work of cleansing lasted for 22 days and terminated on July 8, 1922<sup>73</sup>. A government report on March 1923 said that 'Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee has already captured 125 *Gurdwaras*'.<sup>74</sup> February 17, 1923 the historic shrine of Muktsar was taken over by the Akalis and on February 19, 1923, they got hold on *Bungas* and *langar* and broke the locks of *Gurdwaras*.<sup>75</sup>

Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha who ascended the throne on 20 December 1911, was made to abdicate in favour of his minor son, Partap Singh, on 9 July 1923<sup>76</sup>. the Maharaja of Nabha's dispute was with Maharaja of Patiala and not with the Government of India. Maharaja had great sympathy with the aware of his sympathies with the nationalist and Akali Movements. So he was persuaded to abdicate in favour of his minor son by his self seeking officials and the Political Agent to the Governor-General<sup>77</sup>. The Akali leaders assured their help to Maharaja<sup>78</sup>.

Assured of help from Akali leaders and his own liberal allowances<sup>79</sup>, the Maharaja also won over the editors of some of the Pro-Akali Papers, among them *Sachha Dhandora*, *Daler-i-hind*, *Bir Akali*; and *Kirpan Bahadur*.<sup>80</sup> The Native Press projected Maharaja as a Nationalist Prince; an orthodox self-respecting Sikh ruler' and 'religious leader of the Sikh community'<sup>81</sup> and Maharaja was able to win the good will and support of the majority of the Sikh community

<sup>71</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 1839-1988, p. 204.

<sup>72</sup> *Loc. Cit.*

<sup>73</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, pp.100, 102.

<sup>74</sup> File 25/1923 March cited in Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p.228.

<sup>75</sup> Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 228.; [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Battle\\_of\\_Muktsar](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Battle_of_Muktsar).

<sup>76</sup> Note dated 29 January 1924 in File No. 628-3-P/1924, Foreign Political, N.A-I, as quoted by Mohinder Singh, p. 67; Ruchi Ram Sahni, p. 197.

<sup>77</sup> Letter dated 14 Dec. 1923 from his Highness the maharaja of Nabha to His Excellency Lord Reading, the victory of India, file no-18 (Nabha Records), Punjab State Achieves Patiala, as quoted in Mohinder Singh p. 67.

<sup>78</sup> Ripudaman Singh undated letter to the S.G.P.C. confidential papers, p; 173 *Ibid*, p. 68.

<sup>79</sup> Caveesher Papers in Nehru Memorial Library: *Ibid*, p. 68.

<sup>80</sup> Statement of S.A Dighe in the files of the History of Freedom Movement in the Punjab, Patiala: *Ibid*, p. 68.

<sup>81</sup> See for details Native Press Abstracts, (Punjab) June 1923 to March 1924, particularly *Akali-te-Pardesi*, *Kirpan Bahadur*, *Bande Matram*. *The Tribune* in the N.A.I. and also cuttings from the

As the news of the abdication of the Maharaja and his removal to Dehra Dun was made public, the Pro-Akali news papers strongly reacted and declared that the statements issued by Government were false and deceptive<sup>82</sup> which were obtained as a result of farcical display of chargesheets<sup>83</sup> and that the valuables of Maharaja's family were forcibly taken away.<sup>84</sup> Leaders of Indian National Congress argued that Maharaja was 'deposed not for his short comings but for his virtues'<sup>85</sup>. The Shiromani Akali Dal passed formal resolutions urging the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee to raise a typhoon of agitation till the Maharaja was restored<sup>86</sup>.

The Akali leadership formally took up the question of the restoration of the Maharaja by issuing a communiqué on 9 July 1923<sup>87</sup>. 29 July was fixed as a day of Prayer and 9 Sept. 1923, the day for barefooted Protest March. The *Sangat* was also urged to Pass resolution against the action of Government and Politics agent<sup>88</sup> another communiqué issued on 10 July 1923, it was stated that the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee had very good reasons to believe that the abdication of the Maharaja was not voluntary but had been exhorted by official pressure; that the weakening of the Nabha was the thin end of the wedge against an important section of the Sikh Community<sup>89</sup>. Diwans were held in different parts of Nabha. One such Diwan was organized at Jaito on 25 August 1923. On the third day-27 August – certain resolutions were passed<sup>90</sup>. Under the order of Gurdial Singh, the Assistant Administrator, the State police arrested the organizers –Inder Singh and other Akalis on charges of delivering 'political speeches'<sup>91</sup>. The incident offered the Akalis a challenge and the Diwan, which was originally fixed – for three days and was to disperse on 27 August 1923 was extended indefinitely<sup>92</sup>.

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papers like *Sachha Dhandora*, *Daler-i-Hind*, *Bir Akali* and *Qaumi Dard*, etc., in the personal collection of Dr. Gandha Singh, Patiala.

<sup>82</sup> The *Akali*, 13 August 1923 also Kirpan Bahadur, *Qaumi Dard* and the *Bir Akali* (from a file of newspaper cuttings, Punjab State Achieves), as quoted by Mohinder Singh, p.69.

<sup>83</sup> *The Nation*, 15 August 1923: *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> *The Kesri*, August 1923: *Ibid*, P. 70.

<sup>85</sup> Proceedings of the Cocanada Session: *Ibid*, p. 70.

<sup>86</sup> Shiromani *Akali* Dal Resolutions quoted in File no. 628-3, p., Foreign-Political/1924, N.A.I: *Ibid*, p. 72 & 73.

<sup>87</sup> Press Communiqué no. 5,9 July 1923 issued by S.G.P.C. Amritsar.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*.: No's 5,7,12 dated 9<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1923; Also see, The Civil and Military Gazette, 12 Sept. 1923: as quoted in Mohinder Singh, p. 71.

<sup>89</sup> Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Communiqué 10 July 1923 quoted in File No. 623-3-P: as quoted in Mohinder Singh, p.72.

<sup>90</sup> File No.28 (Nabha Records) P.S.A. Patiala : *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>91</sup> D.O Letter dated 7 September 1923 from Wilson Johnson to C.A.H, Townsend, Chief Secretary, Punjab, File No. 628-3-P, foreign-Political, N.A.I; as quoted in Mohinder Singh, p. 73.

<sup>92</sup> File No. 70 (Nabha Records) at P.S.A Patiala as quoted by Mohinder Singh, p. 73.

The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee passed a resolution to observe 9 September 1923<sup>93</sup> as Nabha Day. The Sikhs of Nabha organized a non-stop recitation of the *Granth* in their *Gurdwaras*. Such ceremonial was held at the temple at Gangsar in Village Jaito. It was interrupted by the Nabha Police, in their bid to arrest the Akalis, including the one reading the holy *Granth*.

Daily *Jathas* were sent to Jaito from Akal Takhat at Amritsar. In the beginning *Jathas* of 25 members daily walked to jaito after taking Pledge before Akal Takhat<sup>94</sup>. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Akali Dal were declared illegal<sup>95</sup>, and 59 Akali leaders were arrested. Now the sizes of *Jathas* going to Jaito increased from Twenty five each to a hundred and then from one hundred to five hundred. Indian National Congress had full sympathy with the *morchas*. Among those arrested at Jaito was Jawahar Lal Nehru.<sup>96</sup>

While Jaito (Nabha) *Morcha* was going on, a second front was opened at Bhai Pheru in Lahore, where the *Mahant* had resiled from an earlier agreement with the Akalis and charged them for trespass. Batches of 25 Akalis began to present themselves for arrest everyday at Bhai Pheru<sup>97</sup>.

The unending stream of Passive resisters that continued to arrive at Jaito and Bhai Pheru exasperated the government, and it made a desperate bid to smash the movement. In first week of January 1924, Amritsar Police raided Akal Takhat, seized documents of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and arrested another 62 men. The English administrator ordered the confiscation of properties of Akalis in the state, restricted many thousands to their villages, and authorized use of greater violence against *Jathas* Coming to Jaito. On Feb 21, 1924<sup>98</sup> one such *jatha* of 500 Akalis arrived at Jaito and on its refusal to disperse was fired<sup>99</sup> on by the state police resulting in considerable loss of life. Second *Shahidi Jatha* started on 28 Feb. 1924.

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<sup>93</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, p. 206.

<sup>94</sup> S.G.P.C, Communiqué No. 94, undated as quoted by Mohinder Singh, p. 173.

<sup>95</sup> Order No. 23772 (Home Judicial) Quoted from File No-28 (Nabha Records) P.S.A. Patiala as quoted by Mohinder Singh, p.75

<sup>96</sup> Khushwant Singh, Vol. 2, 1839-1988, p. 209. Pro-Akali Newspapers put the number of dead and wounded over 500, SGPC communique reported over 300 casualties, including 70 to 150 dead. The official reports and report of judicial Magistrate who conducted enquiry was 19 dead and 28 wounded: *H/P File No. 180/1924*; Mohinder Singh, p. 73.

<sup>97</sup> Khushwant Singh, Vol. 2, 1839-1888, p. 209; [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Jaito\\_Morcha](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Jaito_Morcha); S.G.P.C, Communiqué No. 94, undated/.

<sup>98</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, p. 224-225; Khushwant Singh, Vol-2, 1839-1988, p. 210.

<sup>99</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, p. 225.



Third *Shahidi Jatha* started on March 22, fourth *Shahidi Jatha* on March 27 and fifth *Shahidi Jatha* on 12 April 1924<sup>100</sup>. Government tried to isolate Akalis by giving wide publicity to the story that the Akalis wished to restore Sikh rule in the Punjab. Negotiations were started between the Akali leadership and the British Officials for a solution to the Jaito problem. While the Nabha authorities and the Akali Leadership were busy negotiation over the various issues, the passage, in the meantime, of the Sikh *Gurdwaras* and Shrine Bills, automatically settled the Jaito and other issues. With regard to the Nabha Affair, Malcolm Hailey, the Governor of the Punjab made the following declaration;

The Administrator of Nabha will permit bands of pilgrims to proceed for religious worship to the Gangsar *Gurdwara* under the certain rules.<sup>101</sup> After the passage of the Bill, Bhai Jodh Singh, Sardar Narain Singh and other Sikh Members of the Legislative Council met the Akali leaders in jail and obtained their approval of the Bill and stopping of *Jathas* to Bhai Pheru and Jaito. Bhai Jodh Singh arranged with Mr. Wilson Johnson, the Administrator of Nabha, for the completion of the Akand Paths at Jaito. The first *Jatha*, consisting among others the *Udāsī* and *Nirmala Sadhus*, left Akal Takhat under the leadership of Bhai Jodh Singh and arrived at Jaito on 21 July 1925. Another *Jatha* arrived from Delhi the same day. On 27 July 1925, more *Jathas* reached Jaito after being released from the Nabha Beers and other jails. The deadlock finally ended with the Akalis completing their 101 *Akhand Paths* on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1925<sup>102</sup>. The question of Maharaja Restoration was still unsettled.

The refusal of the Maharaja to give the required statement to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and his public dissociation with the Akalis and their agitation further weakened the position of those Akali leaders who still wanted to carry on the struggle for his restoration. Whatever might have been the facts of his case, the Maharaja had at the stage, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi; ‘made it practically impossible for his well wishers to carry on an effective agitation for his restoration<sup>103</sup>’.

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<sup>100</sup> Ruchi Ram Sahni, pp. 229, 233, 235.

<sup>101</sup> Mohinder Singh, p. 84.

<sup>102</sup> File No. 112-IV/1926, Home Political, N.A.I as quoted by Mohinder Singh, p.84.

<sup>103</sup> Letter of Mahatma Gandhi to the Akali Leaders, quoted in Ganda Singh (Ed.) Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement, as quoted by Mohinder Singh. p. 55.

Maharaja accused Akalis of being treacherous and unfaithful and requested them not to give up the issue of his restoration<sup>104</sup>. After the passage of the Bill and the dropping of the Nabha question by the Akali leadership, he was suddenly removed from Dehra Dun to far-off Kodai Kanal in the South to spend the remaining part of his life, in virtual exile till his death on 14 December 1942.

### III

Finally, the Bill met all the Akali demands and on 2 Nov 1925, The Sikh *Gurdwara* and Shrines act was enforced.<sup>105</sup> The act, as its preamble declares, aimed at providing "for the better administration of certain Sikh *Gurdwaras* and for enquiries into matters and settlement of disputes connected there with..."

The Act has three parts. **Part I** contains, besides preliminary matters such as title, extent and definitions, reference to *Gurdwaras* covered by the Act, procedure for bringing other *Gurdwaras* under its purview, and appointment of and procedures for a *Gurdwara* Tribunal. Interestingly, the definition clause does not define a "Sikh *Gurdwara*," but a subsequent clause, Section 2.10, lays down a "notified Sikh *Gurdwara*" as any *Gurdwara* "declared by notification of the local government under the provision of this Act to be a Sikh *Gurdwara*." Chapter I of this part ( Sections 3 to 11) and the schedules referred to therein are the vital part of the Act.

Two categories of Sikh *Gurdwara* are envisaged, scheduled and unscheduled.

<sup>104</sup> For text of the Letter see Ganda Singh (Ed.), Confidential Papers of the *Akali* Movement, pp. 172-4., as quoted by Mohinder Singh, p. 85.

<sup>105</sup> In the entire agitation (at Tarn Taran, Nankana Sahib, Guru-Ka-Bagh, Bhai Pheru and Jaito) , it is estimated, thirty thousands of the Sikhs went to jail, 15 lacs Rupees were collected as fine. About 400 lives were lost and number of wounded was about 2000; Khushwant Singh, *History Of The Sikhs*, vol. 2, pp. 212-213. The Sikh *Gurdwaras* Act of 1925 had two schedules; the first listed 232 shrines. Another 28 were added to the lists which were recognized as Sikh *Gurdwaras* without further enquiry. The second schedule listed 224 *Akharas* of *Udāsīs* or Nirmalas which were not to be declared *gurdwaras* unless they fulfilled certain conditions. Any Sikh could put in a petition within one year to have any institution (except those listed in the second schedule) declared a *gurdwara*; Khushwant Singh, *History Of The Sikhs*, vol. 2, pp. fn 34; Also see; S.C Mittal, *Freedom Movement in Punjab*, (1905-1929), p. 179; See, Appendix, II, III and IV.

5 April 1921-First Sikh *Gurdwaras* and Shrines Bill introduced in the Pb. Legal Council.

7 Nov. 1922 – Second Sikh *Gurdwaras* and Shrines Bill introduced in the Pb. Legal Council.

7 July 1925 – Sikh *Gurdwaras* and Shrines Bill passed in the Punjab Legal Council.

28 July 1925 – *Gurdwara* Bill gets the approval of Governor General.

2 Nov 1925 – The Sikh *Gurdwara* and Shrines act enforced. Also see;

[http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Gurdwara\\_Reform\\_Movement](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Gurdwara_Reform_Movement) ;

[http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Jaito\\_Morcha](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Jaito_Morcha)

**Schedule 1** contains Important historical shrines where there could be no doubt about their being Sikh *Gurdwara* indisputably owned by Sikhs are listed in Schedule I of the Act. Originally two hundred and forty one *Gurdwaras* were entered in this Schedule, out of which sixty five remained in Pakistan after the partition of the Punjab. However, one hundred and seventy three more *Gurdwaras* within the state of Patiala and East Punjab States Union were added to it by the Amending Act of 1959.

**Schedule II** contains the details of institutions which were not "Sikh" *gurdwaras* about the control of which no dispute could be raised. It enlisted two hundred and twenty four *Akharas* of *Udāsīs* or Nirmalas which were not to be declared *Gurdwaras* unless they fulfilled certain conditions. A list of one hundred and sixteen *Deras*, *Akharas* and *Dharmshalas* was declared as *Udāsī* institutions without any further enquiry. In respect of *Gurdwaras* listed in these two schedules or the scheduled *Gurdwaras* as they are called, the State Government issued a notification in the official Gazette, declaring them to be Sikh *Guudwaras*. The notification also detailed the property claimed by each *Gurdwara*.

A tribunal of three judges was set up to determine whether an institution was or was not a *Gurdwara* and the compensation, if any to be paid to any one deprived of possession. The tribunal's findings were subject to appeal to the High Court. The act provided for elected bodies to replace the *mahants*. The central body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak committee was to consist of 151 members of whom 120 were to be elected, 12 nominated by the Sikh states, 14 to be co-opted, and 5 to represent the four chief shrines of the faith.

Local *gurdwaras* were to have their own elected bodies of management with one nominee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee on its committee. The act also indicated in what way the income of *gurdwaras* was to be utilized. The most important part of the act was to define a Sikh as "one who believed in the ten gurus and the *Granth Sahib* and was not a *patit*(apostate)." This last provision was particularly odious to the Hindu members of the Legislative Council. The Sikh *Gurdwaras* and Shrines Bill gave the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee supreme control over two hundred and forty one important and historic *Gurdwaras* under undisputed Akali control.

## IV

Comparative analysis of the Census figures of the *Udāsīs* from 1881 onwards shows a regular decline in their numerical strength. The reports show that the number of Hindu *Udāsīs* had always been more than the Sikh *Udāsīs*. There was a general decrease in the figures of the Hindus in the Censuses of 1911 and 1931, but the number of Hindu *Udāsīs* between the years from 1921 to 1931 increased by 5.3 %. In 1921, the number of Hindu *Udāsīs* was, 2,661 and in 1931 it rose to 2,803. On the other hand, the population of the Sikhs was growing at the each Census, except during the decade from 1881 to 1891 and in 1881 it was considerably less than half of what was recorded in 1931. In 1881, the Sikhs numbered 1,706,909 and by 1931 they numbered 4,071,624<sup>106</sup>, whereas the number of *Udāsīs* had always remained low.

It is important to note that the highest increase in the number of the *Udāsīs* in fifty years from 1881 to 1931 was in the year of 1881, when 14,149 *Udāsīs* recorded themselves as Hindu *Udāsīs* and 2,243 as Sikh *Udāsīs*, the total number being 16,392. In the coming years, their number showed a downward trend. In 1891, the recorded number of the Hindu *Udāsīs* was 11,835 and the Sikh *Udāsīs* was 4,170, the total being 16,005. In 1901, those who recorded themselves as the Hindu *Udāsīs* were 9,017 and the Sikh *Udāsīs* 2,258, the total being 11,275. In 1911, the number was still decreasing, when there were 2,031 Hindu *Udāsīs* and 1,470 Sikh *Udāsīs*, total being 3,501, recorded as the *Udāsīs*. In 1921, the ratio was 2,661 and 842, the total being 3,503. The resumption of revenue-free-grants, the Akali - *Udāsī* conflict, and the Gurdwara Reform Movement served a serious setback and the *Udāsīs* started sending petitions to the British Government authorities requesting them to consider them as Hindus, instead of recording them as Sikhs in the Census of 1931, as they already had been termed as Sikhs in the previous Census of 1921. But, result was that in 1931,

<sup>106</sup> *Census of India* 1931 Vol XVII ,Punjab,Part 1 ,Khan Ahmed Khan ,Lahore 1933,P.306 .

<b>Census</b>	<b>Absolute figure for Sikhs</b>	<b>% increase</b>	<b>proportion per 10,000</b>
❖ 1881	1,706,909	--	822
❖ 1891	1,849,371	8.4	809
1901	2,102,813	13.7	863
1911	2,881,495	37.0	1,211
1921	3,107,296	7.8	1,238
1931	4,071,624	31.0	1,429
❖	Includes figures for Delhi.		

those who recorded them as Hindu *Udāsīs*, were only 2,803, and the number of Sikh *Udāsīs* was only 385, the total being 3,188 only.

Surprisingly, the *Udāsīs* who generally practised celibacy, had 3,150 female Hindu *Udāsīs* and 665 Sikh female *Udāsīs* in 1881. The total of female *Udāsīs* recorded in 1881 was 3,815. In 1901, the number of female Hindu *Udāsīs* was 1,863 and Sikh female *Udāsīs* 502, the total being 2,365. During the thirty Years from 1881 to 1901, the number of female *Udāsīs* was also decreasing. It is significant to note that they asserted their position in thirty years form 1881 to 1901. Afterwards, because of the upcoming political changes the females did not bother to get themselves registered in the Census Reports.

					Total
Hindu <i>Udāsīs</i>	Male	10999	female	3150	14,149
Sikh <i>Udāsīs</i>	Male	1578	Female	665	2243
<b>Total</b>					16,392

(Reports on the *Census of Punjab, 1881*, Vol-II, Appendix-A, pp. 35, 36 and Vol-III, Appendix-B, PP23-24 by D.C.J Ibbetson, Lahore ,1883; *Final report on the Revision of settlement 1878-1883 of Ludhiana District*, in Punjab, T .Gordon Walker, Calcutta, 1844 p. 42 recorded 2,366 *Udāsīs* as Sikh ascetics.)

					Total
Hindu <i>Udāsīs</i>	Caste	11817	Sect	18	11835
Sikh <i>Udāsīs</i>	Caste	3173	Sect	997	4170
<b>Total</b>					16,005

(*Census of India, 1891*, Report Vol. –XX, XXI, *The Punjab and its Feudatories*, by E.D.Maclagan, Part-II & III, Calcutta ,1892, pp.826-829,572-573; recorded 10,518, Hindus and 1,165 Sikhs as *Udāsīs*)

British Territories :-

					Total
Hindu <i>Udāsīs</i>	Male	7154	Female	1863	9017
Sikh <i>Udāsīs</i>	Male	1756	Female	502	2258
<b>Total</b>					11,275

Native states

					Total
Hindu <i>Udāsīs</i>	Male	2811	Female	654	3465
Sikh <i>Udāsīs</i>	Male	1449	Female	416	1865
<b>Total</b>					5,330

(*Census Report of India, 1901, Punjab and North West Frontier Province*, Vol - XVII, Part-I by H .A.Rose, Government Central Printing Office, Simla, 1902, p.134, 122; Only 401 Sikhs returned as *Udāsīs* by sect. and 4,213 *Udāsīs* got themselves registered as Sikhs by religion. Where as Sikhs numbered 2,130,987 against 1,870,481 in 1891 and increase of 260,506 or 13.9%.)

					<b>Total</b>
Hindu <i>Udāsīs</i>	2031				2031
Sikh <i>Udāsīs</i>	Keshdhari	879	Sahajdhari	591	1470
				<b>Total</b>	3,501

(*Census of India 1911* vol XIV Punjab, Part-I, Report by Hari Kishan Kaul, Lahore, 1912, pp.116,156)

					<b>Total</b>
Hindu <i>Udāsīs</i>	2661				2661
Sikh <i>Udāsīs</i>	Keshdhari	776	Sahajdhari	66	842
				<b>Total</b>	3,503

(*Census of India 1921*, vol –XV Punjab and Delhi, Part I, Report by L.Middleton and S.M.Jacob, Lahore, 1923 pp.180, 185.)

					<b>Total</b>
Hindu <i>Udāsīs</i>	2803				2803
Sikh <i>Udāsīs</i>	Keshdhari	16	Sahajdhari	369	385
				<b>Total</b>	3,188

(*Census of India*, 1931, Vol –XVII, *Punjab*, Part –I, Report, by Khan Ahmed Hasan Khan, Lahore, 1933, pp.301, 309)

## V

The *Akalis*, who had won their struggle against the *Mahants* and the Government control over their *Gurdwaras*, now turned against each other. During the period from 1920 to 25, the Hindus supported the *Udāsī Mahants* against the *Akalis*. This widened the gulf between the two communities. The break away from Hinduism, to which Kahan Singh of Nabha had given expression in his Pamphlet '*Hindu Nahin Hain*' was even more emphatically stated by Mehtab Singh in a speech he delivered in the first *Gurdwara Bill*<sup>107</sup>. Whether the Sikhs were a separate people or a branch of the Hindu social system became a major issue in the years that followed. Similarly, the *Udāsīs* started styling themselves as Hindus and requested the British Government authorities that in the previous Censuses they were termed as Sikhs and now they be considered Hindus in the Census of 1931 and not as Sikhs.

<sup>107</sup> P.L.C.D., April 8, 1921, P. 583, as quoted by Khushwant Singh, Vol-2, 1839-1988, p.214.

## VI

In order to maintain their respectable position in the changed historical situation, the *udāsīs* started making petitions requesting that they should be considered as *sadhus* and distinct from the beggars in the forthcoming Census of 1931. *Udāsī Mahamandal, Punjab, Gujranwala; Sindh prant Udāsī Sadhu Mahamandal, Karachi; Sri Guru Sri Chander Updeshak Sabha, Sakhar, Sindh; Udāsin Mahamandal, Meva Mandi, Lahore; Puna Udāsīn Mandal; Panchayti Akhara Bara Udāsīn, Allahabad; Sadhu Bela Tirath, Sindh* and many other *udāsī Mahants* and *udāsī* associations sent their petitions mentioning “We have observed with pain that there is reserved one column in which under the heading of “*Sadhus*” the profession beggars are also entered and thus classed as “*Sadhus*”. The term “*Sadhus*” amongst Hindus in India signifies those who preach religion or, are incharge, management or control of religious institutions and their status in life is looked upon with respect and reverence. Whereas the profession of begging is confined mostly to very low classes amongst the Hindus and very often to those who are termed untouchables very commonly known in province of Sindh as “*Menghwar*”. It may be that one thing is common between those two classes, that both live on public money but the former viz: the Hindu “*Sadhus*” on account of the services of a very high order that they render to the public, just as priests and ministers among the missionaries in England, France, Italy, and other places on the continent of Europe and the latter viz: the beggars in order to avoid doing honest labour to earn their living take the begging and are thus burden on the society instead of being of any help or assistance to the Society or State. ....” Under the circumstances we pray that you will be pleased to issue directions for the next census that only those persons should be classed as “*Sadhus*” who are such within the liberal and colloquial meaning and significance of the term “*Sadhus*” as used and understood in this country and entered under the column which in the form of the Census of 1921 bore No. 165 with the heading “Priests Ministers” etc”.

The *Udāsīs* also requested the Census Commissioner that they were termed as Sikhs in the census records of 1921 and that in the forthcoming census of 1931 the *Udāsī Sadhus* be termed as Hindus. They made it clear that if they were not considered as Hindus they would be forced to show their resentment through

bycotting the census of 1931<sup>108</sup>. They mentioned “the *Udāsī Sadhus* are Hindus and in every census they are entered in the column of Hindus and not with Sikh community because Sikh community is quite separate from us, *Udāsī Sadhus* are not Sikhs and Sikh are not *Udāsīs*. We worship according to Sanatani Hindus and it is the duty of *Udāsī Sadhus* to preach the religious duties, while the Sikhs do not belong to the preaching class, therefore the Provincial Governments may be advised to enter the *Sadhus* in the column of Hindus and not with Sikhs”.

The Census Commissioner assured the petitioners that differentiation between religious Mendicants and mere beggars will be kept in view<sup>109</sup> and would be considered as ‘Religious Mendicants’ under group 164, order 45 (Religion) class C (Public Administration and Liberal Arts) whereas beggars were to be returned under group 193 as ‘Beggars and Vagrants’, order 54 (Beggars etc.), class D. (miscellaneous), sub-class XII (un-productive). Responding to the petitioners the Census Commissioner’s letter read<sup>110</sup>, “It is understood that the majority of the *Udāsīs* belonged to the Sikh community ten years ago, and in consequently the instructions for recording them as Sikhs were included in the Punjab census code of 1921. It is now reported that the majority are Hindus. Consequently a return of religion Hindu, Caste, *Udāsī* will be included with Hindus and not with Sikhs. The representation is the result of misunderstanding, and the Superintendent of Census operation, Punjab is amending these instructions so as to leave no doubt on the point. The petitioners may be advised accordingly”<sup>111</sup>.

1. The President Sri *Guru* Sri Chandra Usadin upadeshak Sabha, Sukkur (sind)
2. Swami Parmanand, President Udasin Mahamandal, Mewa Mandi, Lahore
3. Mahant Chattar Das *Udāsī* Sadh, Bassian, Tehsil Jagraon, Distt. Ludhiana

<sup>108</sup> Home/Public Department, file no. 45/47/30-Entry of *Udasi Sadhus* in the Column for Hindus in the forth coming census 1930.; also see, Sant Ram, *Udāsī Sikh Nahin*, Chander Press, Amritsar, 1927. pp.1.69; See Appendix VII.

<sup>109</sup> Home/Public department U.O.I, No.D, 4996, Pub/D/12-11-1930 file no. 45/47/30.

<sup>110</sup> Census of Punjab 1881, Vol-2, Appendix-A

<sup>111</sup> Home/Public department U.O.I, No. D, 4996, Pub/D/12-11-1930 file no. 45/47/30. Entry of *Udasi Sadhus* in the column for Hindus in the forth coming census 1930; No’s and dates of the correspondence:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| I.   | O.M. from the P.S.V., no 3443-G.P., dt. 15-11-30 |
| II.  | O.M. from the P.S.V., no 3539-G.P. dt. 26-11-30  |
| III. | O.M. from the P.S.V., no 3570-G.P. dt. 28-11-30  |
| IV.  | O.M. from the P.S.V., no 3572-G.P. dt. 28-11-30  |
| V.   | O.M. from the P.S.V., no 3573-G.P. dt. 28-11-30  |
| VI.  | O.M. from the P.S.V., no 3574-G.P. dt. 28-11-30  |



4. Gopal Das S/o Hari Das *Udāsī*, *Sadh* of raina, P.O. Bhani Saheb, Tehsil and District Ludhiana
5. Bhagwan Das Chela Bhup Dass, *Sadh Udāsī* of Rajkot, Tehsil Jagraon, Distt. Ludhiana
6. Bishan Das, Chela Sharan Das *Udāsī Sadh*, of Raikot, Tehsil, Jagraon, Distt. Ludhiana. F45/47/30, public, dated 4 Dec. 1930.<sup>112</sup>

Similar letters from the Census Commissioner were sent to Gyan Das chela of Moti Ram *Udāsī Sadh* village Sadhar, Tehsil Jagraon, Distt. Ludhiana and Sewa Das Chela of Charan Das *Sadh Udāsī*<sup>113</sup>; Sri Sadhbella Tirath Sukkur, petition no. 633-D, dated 1 Dec. 1930; Sri *Mahant* Harinam, President Sind prant *Udāsī* Sadhu association,<sup>114</sup> Gangadas, secretary, Poona Udasin Mandal, 3 Vetel Peth, Poona city No. D-239/31, dated 16 Jan. 1931;<sup>115</sup> the President Akhil Bharat Varshiaya Sri *Guru* Sri Chandra Udasin Updeshak Sabha, Sukkur, Sind, No. D. 128/31 Public, dt. 15 Jan. 1931; Dharmdas, secretary, Panchayati, *Akhara* Baba Udasin Kdygunj, Allahabad, no. D. 5687/30 Public dt., 5 Jan. 1930; *Mahant* Gurdial as Jambi, no. D.978/31 dt. 21 Feb., 1931; *Udāsī* Sunder Das of Ludhiana; *Mahant* Darshan Das, village Maniary, P.O. Silout, Distt Muzaffarpur (Bihar)<sup>116</sup>; Sri *Mahant* Hariram, president, Sind prant *Udāsī* Sadhu association (Maha Mandal) C/o the secretary, Bawa Charndas, Mithadhar, Karachi letter dt. 11.12.30; *Mahant* Har Parsad, village Heran, P.O. Talwandi Rai, Distt. Ludhiana dt. 16.12.30.

Requests were made by Mela Singh S/o Jawahar Singh dt. 18.12.30 from Sarhali; *Mahant* Sita Ram Das Shastri President, All India *sadhus sabha*, Panchavati, Nasik, dt. 26 Dec. 30<sup>117</sup>; and through telegrams to the Viceroy from the *Mahant* of Dehra Dun and *Mahant* Gurdial Das dt. 12.2.31 to enumerate *Udāsīs* as Hindus and not Sikhs<sup>3</sup>; petition dated 10 Feb. 1931 by Swami Parmanand, President *Udāsī* Maha Mandal, Punjab, Gujranwala that *Udāsīs* to be considered as Hindus not Sikhs<sup>118</sup>.

<sup>112</sup> Home/Public department file no. 45/47/30.

<sup>113</sup> Loc. Cit; O.M. from P.S.V., no. 3613-G.P., dt. 4 Dec. 1930 ; O.M. from P.S.V., no. 3615-G.P. dt. 4 Dec. 1930

<sup>114</sup> Home/Public department file no. 45/47/30; (Maha Mandal) C/o Bawa Charndas, adhar, Karachi, No. D. 5688/30 pub dt. 5 Jan. 1930; Three such petitions were also made to the Census Commissioner from Scehroli(Sahrli) but reply could not be sent to these petitioners as the post and telegraph guide did not show any place by the name of Sehrli in Ludhiana.

<sup>115</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>116</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>117</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>118</sup> Foreign/Political Department. Reform Branch, File no. 42-R/31.

## VI

Thus, we find that many cases to save the institutions under their control were filed by the *Udāsīs* whereas they were countered by the Sikhs. All India Reporter 1945 Sind 177 mentioned that ‘the *Udāsīs* are schismatic holding a position somewhere between orthodox Hindus and Sikhs.’<sup>119</sup> The All India Reporter 1939 Lahore said, ‘though they worship *Samadhs*, etc., they do owe reverence to the *Granth Sahib* without completely renouncing Hinduism. Owing to their, this intermediate position, it is possible for *Udāsīs* to be in-charge of so called Sikh *Gurdwara* property. It however does not follow that the institution is a Sikh *Gurdwara* and not true *Udāsī* institution merely because the *Granth Sahib* is recited in it. Again this does not entitle the Sikhs to claim to be associated in the management of the institution’<sup>120</sup>.

A case decided by the Honourable Lahore High Court by Double Bench (D.B.) Consisting of Honourable Justice Addison and Monroe and reported in 1934 All India Reporter at page 180, first appeal no.1875 of 1931, decided on 15 Nov. 1933. The case is regarding a *Dharmshala* at *Sangatpura* in Amritsar District. Sohan Das and his brother the petitioners asserted that Sohan Das was the *Mahant* of the *Dharmshala* situated at *Sangatpura* in Amritsar. They claimed that the *Dharmshala* was not a Sikh Gurudwara, rather it had been a place of public worship since 1853. The *Dharmshala* contained a *samadh* and that the *Mahants* are *Udāsīs* who do not fall into Gurudwara Act. The claim was objected by Bela Singh and others that the place of worship had been so since 1853 and such worship was connected with the *Granth Sahib* and the village where *Dharmshala* was situated was a Sikh village. They asserted that the *Samadh* existed from recent times more probably after the Sikh Gurudwara controversy had become acute and the importance of the *Samadh* had been realized by the *Udāsī Mahants*. Thirdly, the institution falls within Sikh Gurudwara act (8 of 1925) S.16 (2) (iii).<sup>121</sup>

The court asked the *Patwari* of *Sangatpura* to send his report. The report of *Patwari* mentioned three points of observation. Firstly, that the *Dharmshala* was built of *kuttcha* massonary. It was a Sikh Village and the *Granth Sahib* was recited over

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<sup>119</sup> AIR 1945, Sind, p. 177 (Sikh Gurdwaras Act. 1925, p. 16)

<sup>120</sup> AIR 1939, Lahore, p. 239; The Panjab Local Acts 1825-1988, Vol. XI, Punjab Law Agency, Chandigarh, 1988, p. 400.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 1934, Lahore, pp. 180-181.

there. Secondly, in 1890 when *Mahant* Ram Das had stated that *Granth* Sahib was recited, he did not mention about the existence of *samadh*. When the Sikh Villagers complained against the conduct of Sham Dass on July 25, 1912, an order was made by Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar for a mutation of the *Muafi* in the name of the *Dharmsala* with Sohan Das as manager. Thirdly, it was only in 1911 when the petitioner Sohan Das filed the case that he claimed it to be a *Dharmsala* where *Granth* Sahib was recited by him and his brother and that there was a *Samadh* also. It was on this basis that he claimed it to be an *Udāsi dera*. The Tribunal finally observed that there was no documentary evidence of the early existence of *Samadh*. It is a later thought probably prompted by Gurudwara controversy 1925 that the petitioner had realized the importance of *Samadh* and laid false claims. The tribunal decision declared in favor of *Dharamsala* to be a *Gurudwara* and the judge Addison declared “I hold therefore that the evidence supports the conclusion of the majority of the Tribunal that this institution fall with in S.16 (2) (iii) of the Act and the Tribunal dismissed this appeal with costs”<sup>122</sup>. Means it is not *Udāsi* establishment but a Sikh Gurudwara.

The case of *Mul Singh verses Harnam Singh* reported in the All India Reporter 1934 Lahore 173, first appeal no. 1366 of 1931 decided in the court of Addison and Monroe J.J on 28 November 1933. The petitioner *Mul Singh* claimed that *Dharmsala* in *Pindi Bhattian* in *Gujranwala* District was not a Sikh *Gurudwara*, become certain Hindus performed *Puja* over there. But the objectors *Harnam Singh* and others claimed that it was a Sikh Shrine as *Granth Sahib* was worshipped there, and it was established for the use by Sikhs for purpose of public worship. The Judge Addison observed that as a few or certain Hindus worshipped *Granth Sahib* there, does not conclude that the shrine was of Hindus. Secondly *Mul Singh* claimed that *dharmasla* in *Pindi Bhattian* in *Gujranwala* was not a Sikh Shrine and that *Dharmsala* was founded by the ancestors of *Mul Singh* during the times of *Ranjit Singh* in 1804 and grants were given by *Sardar Dal Singh Kalianwala* in 1804 and by *Diwan Sawan Mal* in 1834 one of the *Kardars* of *Ranjit Singh*<sup>123</sup>. Thirdly, the earlier holders of the *Dera* were *Bhai Sujan Singh* and *Bhai Jagat Singh*. *Jagat Singh* died in 1862 ad was succeeded by *Hardial Singh* who was succeeded by *Hira Singh* the father of *Mul Singh*. *Hira Singh* was Succeeded by *Ladha Singh* and then by *Hazura Singh* brother

<sup>122</sup> *AIR*, 1934, Lahore, pp. 180,181.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 1934, Lahore, pp. 173,174.

of Mul Singh. Mul Singh succeeded his brother. Fourthly, *Pindi Bhattian* was a small town, containing Hindu Arora community, many of whom were Sikhs. The Sikhs were in majority in the town and the Hindus who believed in *Guru Granth Sahib* were considered as *Sahejdhari* Sikhs. He observed that the Hindus of Punjab and of *Pindi Bhattian* read and respected *Granth Sahib*. So the petitioner had claimed it to be a *Dharmshala* of *Udasis*.

The judge Addison's final observation was that *Dharmshala* was founded by ancestor of petitioner, grants were made by Ranjit Singh, *Granth Sahib* was read there in 1858 and in 1863, to which the both sides agree, petitioner Mul Singh & his brother Hazura Singh, made a statement on the death of their father Hari Singh that both them rendered service at *Dharmshala* and read *Granth Sahib* aloud. Mul Singh a *zaildar* and a Sikh preacher held a *Diman* at *Dharmshala* in 1907.<sup>124</sup> He was asked to do so by the Sikhs and *Sehjdharis* of the place. He baptized 13 or 14 of those who attended including Mul Singh the present petitioner. He made an appeal for funds and in this respect his statement was corroborated by Kartar Singh, another witness. This evidence established that Mul Singh was a Sikh though Mul Singh has denied this. The evidence of Darshan Singh cousin of Mul Singh stated that 4 or 5 years back the Sikh *Sangat* of the town had expelled Mul Singh and appointed him as the *Granthi* of the *Gurudwara*. It was declared "of these facts that this institution cannot be held to be a Hindu institution", so the Tribunal dismissed the appeal with costs.<sup>125</sup>

Another such case filed in the court of Addison and Monroe J.J., AIR 1934 Lahore 398, was of petitioner Puran Das V/s Kartar Singh and others, first appeal no. 920, 1931, decided on 29 Jan. 1934. The petitioner Puran Das claimed that *Gurudwara Jagranwan Wala* situated in Kasel in Amritsar, District was a *Udāsī dera*<sup>126</sup>. His case was contested by Kartar Singh and others. *Gurudwara* was found around 1823, the earliest evidence of which is contained in *Mauafi* proceedings. Through an order of extra assistant commissioner, Amritsar made on 20 Sept. 1853 (ex-O-A-2) it was found that *Granth Sahib* was read in this institution which was established about 30 years ago. *Granthi Sahib* Das's statement made on 27 Sept. 1851 showed that the *Dera* was handed over to his predecessor for rendering service to *Dharmshala*; there were also *samadhs* at Kasel and that in cumbents have always been *Udāsīs*. Monroe observed

<sup>124</sup> AIR 1934 Lahore, pp. 173, 174.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 1934 Lahore, p. 173.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 1934, Lahore, p. 398.

“In my opinion the objectors have established that this institution was established for use by Sikhs for the purpose of Public worship. It follows that the findings of the Tribunal is correct and I would dismiss this appeal with costs.” Addison agreed to Monroe’s view<sup>127</sup> that this was not *Udāsī Dera* rather a Sikh *Gurdwara*.

Legislation passed by the Punjab Legislative Council which marked the culmination of the struggle of the Sikh people from 1920 to wrest control of their places of worship from the *Mahants* or priests into whose hands they had passed during the eighteenth century, when the Khalsa were driven from their homes to seek safety in remote hills and deserts. When they later on established their sway in the Punjab, the Sikhs rebuilt their shrines endowing them with large *jagirs* and estates. The management, however, remained with the priests, belonging mainly to the *Udāsī* sect, who, after the advent of the British in 1849, began to consider the shrines and lands attached to them as their personal properties and to appropriating the income accruing from them to their private use. Some of them alienated or sold *Gurdwara* properties at will. They had introduced ceremonial which was anathema to orthodox Sikhs. Besides, there were complaints of immorality against them. All these factors gave rise to what is known as the Gurudwara Reform movement during which Sikhs had to court jail on a large scale and suffer atrocity and death.

The British government, favoured the priests, eventually relented under popular pressure and padded, in the first instance, Sikh *Gurdwara* and Shrines Act, which envisaged a committee nominated by the government to take over control of the *Gurdwaras*. This, however, was not acceptable to the *Akali* leaders and remained for this reason a dead letter. The agitation continued and the government had another draft worked out. Akali counsel was sought this time and the principal demand about the shrines being handed over or the management to a representative body of the Sikhs was conceded. The Bill was moved in the Punjab Legislative Council by Sardar Tara Singh of Moga on 7 May 1925 and piloted by another Sikh member. Bhai Jodh Singh, eminent educationist and theologian. The bill was, in the first instance, referred to a select committee which presented its report on 20 June. The Council passed the bill on 7 July. It was published in the Punjab Government Gazette on 7 Aug. and it became operative on 1 Nov. 1925 as The Sikh *Gurdwaras* Act, 1925 (Punjab Act VIII of 1925).

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<sup>127</sup> *AIR*, 1934, Lahore, p. 398.